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Political Action Committee

NOTE: JASF 2012 **Basic** Cost-cutting Plan – All Counties – updated 9.25.26 with statutes(at end). *Other spending reduction strategies are listed after the statute citations. These can yield more savings and operational improvements.*

County Plan to Cut Spending and Balance the Budget

Across-the-board cuts do not get to the root of the over-spending, under-performing problem. Cutting 2.5%, 5%, or 10% of a department or program that operates outside basic statutory authority does not go far enough to solve the fiscal problem. It is time to get **county government spending under control** by:

1. Prioritizing Statutory and Constitutional Mandates

- **Core Mandates First:** Focus the county budget strictly on the core **statutory duties mandated by the Texas Constitution and Texas Local Government Code**, making these the top budget priorities.
- **Non-Mandated Services:** Identify and deprioritize optional, non-mandated county services that exceed core public safety, judicial, and infrastructure obligations.

2. Implementing Zero-Based Budgeting

- **Justify Every Dollar:** Employ zero-based budgeting across all departments, including the offices of **elected county officials, commissioners court operations, and administrative programs**.
- **Baseline Reset:** Require every department head to build their budget request from zero each fiscal year, proving the operational necessity of every line item rather than relying on historical baselines.

3. Verification and Reporting of Service Costs

- **Status Verification:** Mandate lawful proof of citizenship or legal residency for all county-funded public services, economic assistance, and local benefits wherever permitted by law.
- **Federal Mandates:** For services explicitly mandated by federal law or court rulings—such as emergency healthcare at county hospital districts or county jail medical care—require all local service providers to verify legal status via **E-Verify** or other reliable systems.
- **Cost Tracking:** Track the financial costs of providing non-mandated and emergency services to undocumented individuals and report these aggregated costs transparently to the **Commissioners Court, the State of Texas, and county taxpayers**.

4. Eliminating Overlapping and Duplicated County Offices

- **Consolidate Services:** Eliminate overlapping or duplicated departments, administrative roles, and programs across the county.
- **Targeted Redundancies:** Audit and merge redundant operations, such as consolidating fragmented county technology teams into a centralized IT department, streamlining internal processing between the **County Clerk and District Clerk** where applicable, and unifying parallel maintenance, fleet management, or environmental compliance programs.

5. Injecting Competition and Centralizing Procurement

- **Central Procurement:** Centralize all county procurement processes to maximize volume-purchasing discounts and establish strict contract-management oversight.
- **Service Outsourcing:** Inject private-sector competition into the delivery of non-core services, aggressively evaluating opportunities to outsource facilities maintenance, fleet repairs, and specialized operations to lower overall taxpayer costs.
- **Institute an aggressive contract management system –** end all auto renewals.

6. Deferring Capital Asset Purchases & Comparing Cost-Benefit of Leasing Equipment

- **Purchase Deferrals:** Determine the feasibility of purchasing deferrals for all unspent capital allocations in the current fiscal year and freeze new capital budget requests.
- **Asset Freeze:** Apply this freeze to non-essential county vehicles, heavy equipment, office technology upgrades, and new facility renovations or remodels unless they directly impact public safety or legally mandated operations.

7. Enacting a Personnel Freeze and Benefit Review

- **Hiring Freeze:** Institute an immediate county-wide hiring freeze for all non-essential personnel and conduct a thorough review of all county positions, personnel policies, and employee benefits.
- **Retirement System Oversight:** Evaluate the county's funding and exposure to the **Texas County and District Retirement System (TCDRS)** to ensure long-term fiscal solvency.
- **Benefit Adjustments:** End localized longevity or discretionary pay policies and adjust employee contribution tiers toward their healthcare premiums and pension benefits to align with private-sector standards.

8. Restructuring County Compensation and Capping Executive Pay

- **Tie Compensation to performance and establish specific COLA triggers tied to local economic metrics**
- **Salary Freezes:** freeze pay increases for department heads and administrators until a balanced budget is secured.

9. Ending Budgetary Fund Diversions

- **Strict Fund Integrity:** End the internal county practice of diverting dedicated funds from their originally intended statutory purposes to cover unrelated shortfalls in the General Fund.
- **Transportation Safeguards:** Ensure that dedicated local infrastructure dollars, such as county road and bridge fees or specialized local transit allocations, are spent 100% on actual infrastructure rather than being swept into general administrative overhead.

10. Instituting Local Accountability and Performance Reviews

- **Mission Alignment:** Mandate an aggressive review of all county departments and programs to match annual funding strictly with their originally intended mission.
- **Measurable Results:** Demand measurable operational results from every department to justify ongoing taxpayer support.
- **Citizen Oversight Board:** Create a localized "County Sunset Review Board" modeled after the state system but structurally revamped to ensure it is dominated by **private citizen taxpaying representation** rather than career bureaucrats, politicians, and vendors.

11. Consolidating and Refinancing County Debt

- **Debt Optimization:** Review all outstanding county debt, including General Obligation (GO) bonds and Certificates of Obligation (COs, if any).
- **Refinancing Savings:** Pursue aggressive savings through debt consolidation, restructuring, and refinancing to capture lower interest rates and reduce the overall property tax burden required for debt service.

12. Suspending Non-Essential Recreational and Historical Funding

- **Funding Suspension:** Immediately suspend all discretionary county funding for the creation or expansion of county parks, bike paths, and walking trails.
- **Discretionary Freeze:** Freeze county-level capital spending on the cosmetic renovation or non-essential maintenance of historical local properties until core fiscal obligations are balanced.

13. Eliminating Local Economic Incentives and Subsidies

- **End Corporate Welfare:** Eliminate county-funded economic development incentives, corporate subsidies, and local tax abatements (such as discretionary Chapter 381 agreements). Count the cost of TIRZ agreements and end participation as soon as possible.
- **The Texas Advantage:** Rely instead on the broader Texas framework—characterized by no state income tax, low overall regulatory burdens, right-to-work protections, and a robust civil justice system—to naturally attract businesses to the county without shifting financial risks onto local property owners.

In Texas, county governments operate under strict statutory limitations defined by the state. ***Unlike a municipality or the state government, a county has no home-rule authority; it can only execute powers explicitly granted to it by the Texas Legislature.***

To legally freeze capital assets or restructure departmental budgets, a **County Commissioners Court** must operate through specific subchapters of the Texas Local Government Code (LGC), while navigating constitutional limits concerning other elected county officials. [1]

Restructuring Department Budgets

The mechanisms for freezing funds, shifting line items, or completely overriding department allocations mid-year depend strictly on the county's size and population tier under LGC Title 4, Subtitle B, Chapter 111. [1]

- **Subchapter A (Counties with Populations of 225,000 or Less):** Governed by LGC § 111.010. The Commissioners Court may amend the budget by order to transfer an amount from one budgeted item to another without declaring an emergency, allowing them to systematically drain or reallocate a department's funding to another priority. [2, 3, 4]
- **Subchapter B (Counties with Populations over 225,000):** Governed by LGC § 111.041, which grants identical authority to the Commissioners Court to shift funds between line items and departments via court order. [4]
- **Subchapter C (Counties with an Appointed Budget Officer):** Governed by LGC § 111.070. This permits the court to amend the budget to transfer funds between items to facilitate mid-year operational restructuring. [2, 5]

The Constitutional Limit on Budget Restructuring

While the Commissioners Court holds total "power of the purse" over the county budget, they **cannot eliminate the budget of another elected official** (such as the County Sheriff, County Clerk, or District Attorney) so severely that it prevents them from performing their basic constitutional duties. Doing so invites a lawsuit for "abuse of discretion."

Legally Freezing Capital Assets

To halt the purchase of vehicles, heavy equipment, office technology, or facility upgrades mid-year, the county relies on a combination of budget-transfer laws and strict procurement regulations:

- **Line-Item Starvation via Budget Amendment:** Using the respective budget transfer sections cited above (LGC §§ 111.010, 111.041, or 111.070), the Commissioners Court can vote to **amend the budget and transfer unspent capital allocation funds** out of departmental asset accounts and move them into a "frozen" or unappropriated general contingency fund. [4, 5, 6]
- **The County Purchasing Act Restriction:** Under LGC § 262.023, any single county purchase or contract exceeding the statutory bidding threshold must go out for competitive bidding. The

Commissioners Court has total authority over whether or not to reject all bids or refuse to award a contract. By simply voting to "table indefinitely" or "reject all bids" for capital assets, the court effectively freezes procurement dead in its tracks. [7, 8]

- **County Auditor Certification Intercept:** Under LGC § 262.011 and general county audit frameworks, a county cannot legally execute a purchase contract unless the **County Auditor** formally certifies that unencumbered funds are available in the budget to pay for it. By transferring the capital funds out of the account beforehand, the Auditor is legally blocked from certifying the purchase, stopping any rogue capital acquisitions by individual department heads. [9, 10]

Summary Table: Statutory Mechanisms for a County Freeze

Objective	Applicable Statute	Mechanism / Legal Action
Shift/Cut Department Funds	LGC §§ 111.010(c) / 111.041(c) / 111.070(c)	Commissioners Court passes an order transferring budgeted items to a centralized contingency pool.
Halt Capital Acquisitions	LGC § 262.023	Court exercises its statutory authority to reject all competitive bids or refuse contract approval for equipment and upgrades.
Enforce Spending Compliance	LGC § 111.010(b) / § 111.070(a)	Mandates that county funds can *only* be spent in strict compliance with the budget. Mid-year shifts must be approved by the Court.

[1] https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov
[2] https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov
[3] https://codes.findlaw.com
[4] https://codes.findlaw.com
[5] https://codes.findlaw.com
[6] https://law.justia.com
[7] https://countyorgprodblob2023.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net
[8] https://www.county.org
[9] https://codes.findlaw.com
[10] https://countyprogress.com

Other Practical Ways to Eliminate Waste in County Government – the Business Approach:

2. **Performance-Based Funding |** Allocate resources based on measurable outcomes, ensuring programs that fail to deliver are reduced or eliminated.

4. **Process mapping of departments for consolidation of services and operational improvements |** Merge overlapping departments or functions (e.g., IT, HR) to reduce duplication and administrative overhead.

5. **Maximize Shared Purchasing Agreements |** Partner with neighboring counties or municipalities for bulk purchasing to lower costs.

6. **Digital Transformation |** Replace paper-heavy processes with online systems to cut printing, mailing, and storage costs.

7. **Energy Efficiency Upgrades of all county buildings |** Retrofit county buildings with LED lighting, smart thermostats to reduce utility bills.

9. **Fleet Optimization & Fleet Management |** includes Heavy Equipment (lease vs purchase)

10. **Outsourcing Non-Core Functions |** Contract out services like janitorial or landscaping where private providers can deliver more cost-effectively.

10. **Volunteer & Community Partnerships |** Engage local nonprofits and volunteers for certain public programs, reducing staffing costs.

11. **Review of ALL Contracts – eliminate all auto renewals**

12. **Travel & Conference Restrictions |** Limit out-of-county travel to essential purposes only, with strict expense caps and reporting tied to performance.

13. **Transparent Spending Dashboard |** Publish user-friendly data for all county expenditures online for public review, encouraging accountability and reducing waste.

14. **Continuous Improvement Teams |** Create cross-department task forces to identify inefficiencies and recommend cost-saving innovations quarterly; tie to performance pay or budgetary incentives.

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